DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 195 CS 001 995

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TITLE How Do You Turn Them On After They've Been Turned off?
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Farwest Regional Conference of the International Reading Association (3rd, Reno, February 6-8, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Instructional Materials; *Reading Difficulty; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Interests; Reading Skills; *Remedial Reading; Student Motivation; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

One of the most difficult problems facing teachers of remedial reading is getting students interested in the act of reading. Causes of students' negative attitudes toward reading include the following: flexible grouping which turns out to be inflexible; teachers' selecting the books students have to read; and the requiring of book reports on everything read. Remedial students need counseling, and they need to establish personal relationships as much as they need remedial or corrective reading. Once the teacher learns to express a positive attitude toward the student as an individual, the student's self-concept begins to be reshaped in a positive way. At this point teachers may start to select materials and methods that are consistent with the needs of the students. (RB)

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How Do You Turn Them On After They've Been Turned Off?

How do you turn them on after they've been turned off? This was the question with which we were confronted. A question for which we had to find some type of solution, knowing full well that there was no answer which would be a panacea. We had to examine first those things that were responsible for turning them off, and then seek the kinds of materials and activities which would counteract the turnoff; perhaps be the sparkplug in turning them on.

While there is much disagreement among people in reading about techniques and materials used, there seems to be little or no disagreement as to things that turn pupils off to reading. So let me just refresh your memory briefly on the turnoffs: 1) Grouping into flexible groups which turn out to be inflexible. This was the greatest fraud ever perpetrated on pupils. We know that groups are flexible if you want to move them from a top group to a lower group but the reverse is not true because the gap gets wider as time goes on. 2) Telling a pupil with reading difficulties, "Come on, it's easy, you can do it." Believe me, if he could, he would. 3) Comparing a boy's lack of reading ability to a girls ability to read in the beginning grades. If Johnny had Joannie's maturity, he would be a Joannie instead of a Johnny. 4) We stop reading to them after age seven, telling them they are old enough to read to themselves. There is much agreement among experts in the field of reading that one of the best ways to get people hooked on reading and improve reading skills, is to read to them. 5) Stopping students in the middle of a story to check on comprehension, vocabulary, meaning, parts of speech, words, attack skills - another turn off. 6) Selecting the books pupils have to read, and telling students to confine their reading to books on their level. 7) When in the library be sure to review all books selected by the student before letting him take them out. 8) Give him a list of books he has to read during summer vacation. 9) Make sure every time he reads a book, he has to do a book report or give an oral report. 10) In-

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sist he know the difference between good literature and trash. Don't permit comic books, Playboy magazine, Mad magazine, and other spicy books and periodicals, and 11) confuse them by telling them that reaction to literature is a personal thing and then insist that they get the same meaning as the manual dictates.

We oversaturate them with purple ditto sheets, programmed books, individual learning packets--forgetting that small group and total group interaction is still a better learning situation. We reserve the exciting, very challenging programs for the academically talented as we relegate these youngsters in the remedial or corrective reading classes whichever you prefer to call them, to more dull, routine drill type of materials.

Now that we've listed the negative actions in the classroom, let's examine some of the positive things we can do.

There are three songs that date back so far, they are now in the realm of nostalgia. These three songs have had a tremendous influence on my teaching of reading. The first was Roger and Hammersteins, Getting to Know You, the second was, You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You and the third was a song by Johnny Mercer whose title I can't recall, but the gist of the lyrics is on Accentuate the Positive, 'Eliminate the Negative' and then something happens in between but I've forgotten what, but as far as reading is concerned I think they will learn to read. Let's analyze these three songs and how their themes apply to the teaching of reading.

Getting to Know You - To pupils with reading disabilities one of the most important things is getting to know them. Letting them talk about things that they're concerned about is getting to know them. Letting them talk about things that bother them. Find out, if possible, what has turned them off. There are new and different techniques that can be used to try to turn them on. Recently working with a group of students on a junior high school level, students whose

scores were so low on a reading test that they came up with no scores - in questioning them as to what they liked or didn't like about reading - the thing that came up consistently was "We can't stand those packets," "Teacher gives us a book to read and questions to answer - two questions to every chapter," "Nobody ever talks to us about the book," 'Nobody ever discusses the book.' ''We sit down, we read the book, we answer the questions.'' "We read a chapter, we answer the question." Remedial students need counseling as much as they need remedial or corrective reading whichever you choose to call it. There is a need for diagnosis so that a prescriptive program can be written but we know that they have a reading disability when they come to us. So try to do a minimum amount of testing because these youngsters have been so oversaturated with tests that they immediately freeze in testing situations, or they react in such a negative manner that they sit there and pay absolutely no attention to the directions, pay no attention towards what you want them to do and their whole attitude towards testing is "I gotta get through this so let me see what kind of a pattern I can make." So again, a minimum amount of testing. As you observe and work with the youngster his skills and deficiencies will come to light. And we're concerned with his strengths and weaknesses as an individual and not with the strengths and weaknesses as they come up on a norm based test.

<u>You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You</u>. We have to build a more positive attitude with these students and one of the ways is to show them that we care about them; we're concerned about them as an individual and not as an anonymity who has come up as a stanine 2 or a 3rd percentile or 4th percentile whichever they scored.

<u>Accentuate the Positive</u> - give the pupil a feeling of success or set goals on small plateaus so that he can attain some measure of success. Coombs says, "Seeing is Behaving." If you see a pupil as successful, he'll be successful. If you see him as a failure, he'll fail because pupils want to please the teacher.

Every youngster has some area of strength and I don't care what it is. Whatever his strength is, capitalize on it even if he's only the best thumbtacker upper in the class, or he's the tallest kid in the class and can always reach the top shelf or he's the shortest kid in the class who can pick things up off the floor when the teacher is unable to stoop.

I was in a class recently and the teacher was demonstrating her new telebinocular, very pleased that the school had finally gotten one and she turned to a youngster and asked him to plug the thing in. And then she looked at him and said "David, you are the best plugger-inner that I have." And you know David was so pleased, he smiled from ear-to-ear and his day was made. I know David and David is one of the poorer students in the school, academically, but she found something to praise about him, and David was going to have a successful day.

In a Farwest Regional meeting recently Leo Buscaglia spoke about the importance of song and dance and poetry in education. I feel not only is song and dance and poetry important, but physical activity and art and science and math and anything that will capture the interest of the youngster. All of these are important in his learning how to read. Instead, where do we find ourselves? We are faced with accountability in education, But instead of being accountable for the things that matter, we are expected to be accountable in terms of stanines, percentiles, composite scores. We have fragmented the teaching of the skills into so many meaningless, isolated, abstract minutiae so as to make them useless as far as the remedial student is concerned.

Morton Botel, in a recent talk in Las Vegas, created a furor when he brought out the fact that this method of teaching the abstract skills to remedial students is useless because it is the good reader who can absorb the abstractions. In our school district we have taken the skills and listed them in such a way that a teacher has to check one hundred and eighty skills broken into about

twenty different categories in order to be held accountable for the things she's teaching in reading. These things are meaningless, if our concern is for each student as an individual and not as an average, nonexistant scorer on a standardized test, which is probably so culturally biased in most situations, that I question the validity of many of these tests. This concern with accountability with things that measure the unimportant, this concern for covering the book, overlooks the important but unmeasurable factor of "Have we changed the student's attitude toward reading?" This constant testing to get information that we already know about these youngsters is beginning to take the joy out of teaching and the fun and excitement out of learning.

We set up creative learning centers for the academically talented as we relegate the students with reading disabilities, (these students who need exciting, varied activities) to another programmed reader - some more purple ditto sheets. On occasion we change the purple ditto sheet to a red ditto sheet or maybe a black ditto sheet for variety. We expose them to another individual learning packet and expect them to sit in a corner and learn their skills. If they could do it on their own they wouldn't need us.

We in our program try to stress creative, exciting, interesting, challenging activities since our philosophy is that the teaching of reading as it is taking place today is not a subject but the teaching of skills which can be utilized for the varied reasons for which we need these skills, be it for reading in the content areas, for information or for recreation, we list all the skills which are supposed to be taught in the so-called reading period. We analyze them to identify which content areas or which types of situations or activities are the best suited for the teaching of these skills. Then we teach these skills through the discipline or activity to which these skills are most unique.

Studies in Human Growth and Development have proven that children learn through different modalities. In observing reading as it is taught now most

emphasis is placed on two of the modalities, visual and the auditory. Some emphasis is placed on the third modality - motor or kinaesthetic. But we're overlooking two of the modalities - the sapiditory and the olfactory. I know some of us have a tasting unit or a smelling unit in science or use a basal series which has a page or two where a child can rub and smell a rose or a pickle and that's it. But how about all the other things in this world which children can't understand or can't visualize or can't imagine unless they actually see or touch them or smell them or feel them.

We in our program try to place emphasis on all modalities. We're observing the work being done by, Robert and Marlene McKracken, in their research using the sapiditory modality. We're also using the muscular action and mental action words developed by Toothacre to put more stress on the Kinaesthetic modality and we use the vocabulary of the senses developed by Albert Frazier to put stress on all five senses.

Our program may sound like a laissez-faire program or it may look like a laissez-faire program to observers. It sometimes looks chaotic but I like to refer to it as organized confusion because it is a highly structured, carefully preplanned, carefully prepared and hopefully, palatably presented program. I don't intend to leave you with the idea it is a panacea. Many times when we pretest and then post test, our post test may show little gain, no gain or sometimes lower scores. But we do observe a change in self-concept and a change in attitude to reading and this is our main concern, because once the pupils have a positive attitude they begin to read and there's no better way to improve reading than to read.

Like the doting grandmother who just happens to have a few pictures of her grandchild, I just happen to have some slides to show some of the activities carried on in our program.

Now before I show you the slides I want to tell you they are not the best slides in the world because they were taken by the students - students of all ages ranging from the primary student to the middle grade student to the junior high and senior high student. Photography is one of the learning activities we have set up in our program but in order to take the photographs the youngster has to prove to us that he can read instructions, that he can follow the directions, that he can tell us the cost of taking the picture on the basis of the cost per roll of film, that he can figure out the cost of developing the pictures. Now, what better realistic learning situation? He has to read. He has to think in terms of understanding what he is reading. He has to follow directions, he has to think in terms of cost, (his mathematical computation). He can either write down his findings or he can discuss them orally. Regardless of what he does, he has been exposed to some form of language arts and so we can justify what we're doing in terms of a marvelous learning situation.

Now, let me show you some of these slides and look at the faces of some of the youngsters as they are working or they are showing some of their work. And if this isn't a change in attitude, if this isn't turning them on, then I don't know what to call it.